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Feeding Solid Foods to Your Baby: What Every Parent Should Know

By Jennifer Bañuelos, BS, Kara Ishii, MSW, and Jane Heinig, PhD, IBCLC

Congratulations! Your baby is a few months old now and seems to be growing so fast. You may be thinking about starting solid foods. You want the best for your baby, but when and how to begin feeding solid foods can be confusing. Here are some helpful tips about feeding solid foods to your baby.

Your Baby's Needs: Birth to 6 Months

Exclusive breastfeeding provides all the nutrients your baby needs during the first few months of life. As your baby grows, more calories and nutrients will be needed than can be easily provided by breast milk. Around the same time, your baby's mouth and digestive tract begin to change. These changes prepare your baby to eat solid foods. The introduction of solid foods, along with breast milk, is an important part of your baby's development. Solid foods should begin to be given at around 6 months of age. But babies develop at different times and have different needs. **Talk to your doctor before giving your baby solid foods.**

Your Baby's Needs: 6-12 Months

Feeding solid foods must be started slowly and with patience. Your baby needs time to get used to different tastes and textures. As you add new foods, you should continue breastfeeding as normal.

Here is a **guideline** to give you an idea about when babies can usually eat which kinds of foods.

- **Birth to about 6 months:** Breast milk only.
- **About 6-7 months:** Iron-fortified infant cereal and breast milk.
- **About 6-8 months:** Strained or mashed vegetables, fruits, and meats; juice in a cup; and breast milk.
- **About 7-10 months:** Finger foods (dry cereal, crackers, tortillas, cooked vegetables, soft fruits), and breast milk.
- **About 8-12 months:** Mashed or chopped foods from the family meal (ground or finely chopped meats, fish, or poultry; cottage cheese), and breast milk.

Don't panic if your baby doesn't eat solid food right away. Remember, this is a time for learning. Your baby must *learn* to eat solid foods. As your baby adjusts to the new foods, you should slowly offer other kinds of foods. ■

Myth Busters (next page)

Best Ways to Feed Your Baby (next page)



Myth Busters

Myth #1: Solid foods should be introduced when your baby eats more often than every 3 hours.

Babies have different stomach sizes and eating habits. Some babies need to eat every 5 hours. Others may need to eat only every 2 hours. Counting hours between feeds does not tell you if your baby is ready to eat solid foods.

Myth #2: You must start solid foods early or else your baby will become picky and refuse them later.

Before 6 months of age, your baby does not need solid foods. There is no proof that your baby will refuse solid foods if you wait to begin feeding solid foods until 6 months or later. Breast milk has many flavors. Breast fed babies are more likely to try different foods.

Myth #3: Feeding your baby cereal is a good way to help your baby sleep through the night.

Cereal is a solid food. Giving solid food to your baby too early is not healthy for your baby. Also, your baby's stomach is about the size of his or her fist. It does not hold much food. This is why feeding must occur more often. As your baby grows, he or she will begin to sleep longer.

FOODS not to give your baby

- Soda
- Candy
- Popcorn
- Raisins
- Cow's milk (not before 1 year of age)
- Added salt, sugar, or spices
- Whole grapes
- Hot dogs
- Chips
- French fries
- Nuts

If you have a family history of allergies, talk to your doctor about what not to give your baby.

Your Local Lactation Consultant

Helpful tips**best ways to feed your baby**

- ➔ Breastfeed first, then offer a little cereal. This will keep your milk supply the same.
- ➔ Keep your breastfeeding schedule the same, even when adding solid foods.
- ➔ Feed your baby when there are few distractions.
- ➔ Never give cereal or any other foods through the bottle.
- ➔ Start with foods that are smooth and runny. They will be easiest for your baby to swallow. Slowly add texture as your baby gets used to the food.
- ➔ Feed your baby from a plate or bowl, not from a jar. The food left in the jar will spoil quickly from the baby's saliva.
- ➔ Feed your baby when the family eats. This will make him or her more likely to try new foods.
- ➔ Do not force your baby to eat. He or she is more likely to eat if it is not forced.
- ➔ Give only 2 to 4 ounces of juice per day. Too much juice is bad for your baby.
- ➔ Give only one new food every few days. This will make it easy to see if your baby has allergies to any foods.